

Reviews

'An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Borneo', by B. E. Smythies, B.A., M.B.O.U.,
Sarawak Museum Journal, No. 24 Old Series (Vol. 7, pt. 3, New Series),
June 1957: pp. 523-818, one map. Published Sarawak Museum, Kuching.
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THIS VERY WELCOME new list of the birds of Borneo, prepared by B. E. Smythies, author of *Birds of Burma*¹ and now Honorary Curator of Birds at the Sarawak Museum, follows roughly the lines of 'An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Malaya', published in the present series of journals some ten years ago.² But Smythies's list covers the complete Bornean Province, as defined by F. N. Chasen,³ while the Malayan list stops at the frontier between Malaya and Thailand (Siam), and thus covers only about two-thirds of Chasen's Malayan Province. If this premature halt were merely an idiosyncrasy of the author, it would not concern us for long, but the reason for truncating the natural province in this way is significant.

There has not really been much collecting in Malaya, apart from a few centres, as Dr. Gibson-Hill pointed out, but over the last twenty years or so a small group of amateur ornithologists have turned in a large number of observations on habit and habitat, and even visual records of forms which have not yet been taken in the area. This activity has occurred only in the part of the peninsula south of the Malaya-Thailand border. North of the frontier remains a *tanah mati* in this respect, all visual records cease. There is no doubt that we have a richer avifauna in Borneo, and certainly also it has attracted a considerable number of expeditions and individual collectors over the last hundred years. We thus have a fairly widespread cover of the region in terms of formal records obtained by professional and semi-professional workers; and we have had relatively few ornithologists turning in sight records, apart from the present curator, Tom Harrisson himself, who has certainly been doing his best for us.⁴ The result is that the cover, though sparse, is relatively even over the greater part of Borneo, except inevitably for the inaccessible central region, and it is nearly all of the same quality. Mt. Kinabalu at times has seemed to be assuming the role of a holiday resort for biologists in the field. Fortunately a fair proportion of those who have started on the well-worn route to its summit have had no interest in ornithology, and the excess of records from this region is not as appreciable as one might fear on theoretical grounds.

1. B. E. Smythies, *Birds of Burma*, edited by H. C. Smith & P. F. Garthwaite, with 31 coloured plates by Lt.-Cmdr. A. M. Hughes, R.N., pp. xxxii + 589, one map, American Baptist Mission Press, Rangoon, 1940. Second edition, text extensively revised by the author, plates unchanged, pp. xliii + 668, one map, Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh and London, 1953.

2. C. A. Gibson-Hill, 'An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Malaya', *Bull. Raffles Mus.*, 20, September 1949, 299 pp.

3. F. N. Chasen, 'A Handlist of Malaysian Birds', *Bull. Raffles Mus.*, 11, 1935 [not 1953, as on p. 524 of *Sarawak Mus. Journ.*, above]; see pp. viii-ix (Malayan Province) & xi-xiii (Bornean Province).

4. The present work, of course, contains a number of hitherto unpublished field notes by the author, B. E. Smythies, and some from notes supplied by A. R. G. Morrison and F. G. H. Allen: the latter, over for a few months from Malaya, covered only the Kuching area, where he quietly showed us *Parus major*, in the mangroves at Pending, just outside the capital (only two previous records for Borneo, both near the Benge range, south of Bau, before 1889 & before 1885).

A commendable addition to the general arrangement in the introductory section is the inclusion of an authoritative note on the 'Ecology of Borneo' (pp. 527-8), a feature which might well be followed by other authors. The 'Historical Sketch' (pp. 531-52) which follows occupies a large proportion of the opening pages. It has been compiled carefully, and the result is an extremely interesting section, of considerable value even in its own light, apart from the support which it gives to the list that follows. Two small additions might have been made in this section. We are told that E. Banks 'in 1932 was with the Oxford Expedition on Mt. Dulit'; he led it. And there is no reference in this section to V. W. Ryves's visits to North Borneo, April to August 1938, and January to April 1939.⁵ It is also useful to find a summary of the principal collections of Bornean birds in other Museums, though it is difficult to unearth much on the Kuching collection itself, beyond its designation as 'The largest Sarawak collection in existence, dating from 1891; and 500 specimens from North Borneo' (p. 552), and the editorial comment that in preparing this list Smythies had to tackle 'the mass of museum and literary material, so long unco-ordinated and sometimes almost chaotic' (p. viii); one wonders how it got like that!

Smythies provides a rather longer bibliography (pp. 782-800). He again omits earlier papers of purely taxonomic interest, but he includes a number of works descriptive of birds occurring in Borneo which say nothing significant on their range there; in addition he gives a few accounts of little-known sections of the Bornean landscape, and one or two items of travel in Borneo. He thoughtfully provides an index of the place names mentioned in the text but not marked on the map—a most valuable addition in the present instance. He also includes the English trivial names, putting them with the scientific names in a combined index (pp. 806-15), and gives additional indexes of vernacular names (pp. 816-8), and 'Sarawak Museum Curators' (p. 801). The indexes of local and English names, at least, are certainly useful, but the function of the 'Index of Sarawak Museum Curators' seems obscure: it occupies a full page, for a mere eight names, with no page numbers apportioned against them. It is also unfortunate that about forty of the entries in the list of local names—good Dayak names like *Seutang* and *Pipit Antu*—are not given in the text beside the birds concerned. Seemingly we have here a divergence of opinion between author and editor: in his introduction Smythies says, 'Only Malay names (M), Iban names (I), and one or two Kelabit names are given. These are largely taken from the list by Banks (1935a: 268-72), but some considered of doubtful value are omitted . . .' (p. 529).

A more serious defect arising somewhere between author, editor and printer, is the typography: maybe the editor left it to the author, or the author to the editor; possibly everyone left it to the type-setter, who is certainly the only person who can be said to have gained by the present arrangement. With an infinite monotony, the annotated list

⁵ V. W. Ryves was collecting birds' eggs, not skins. In 1938 his localities were Pulau Bai, Sandakan Estate, Sungei Batang & Tanjong Telok; in 1939, Kabayan, Kluang, Kota Belud, Kaung & Kuala Abai; in this latter period he also took two clutches of Megapode eggs from the Mantanani Is., off Agal Bay. A report on his collection occurs in C. A. Gibson-Hill, Ornithological Notes from the Raffles Museum, No. 5, 'A collection of Birds' Eggs from North Borneo', *Bull. Raffles Mus.*, 21, 1950, pp. 106-115. See also, *ibid.*, No. 18, 'The apparent breeding seasons of Land Birds in North Borneo & Malaya', *Bull. Raffles Mus.*, 24, 1952, pp. 270-94. And V. W. Ryves, 'The nesting of the Megapode in North Borneo', *Sarawak Museum Journal*, 20 Old Series (6, pt 2, N.S.), 1955, pp. 316-7.

itself (pp. 553-781), all 229 pages of it, is set almost entirely in 10pt light Roman: on this basis the scientific names only are given in light italics, with continuous Roman capitals for the English name headings and the type-localities. But the family names are set in 10pt bold, upper and lower case—preceded by the English equivalents in light capitals again!—and there are a few notes, probably less than a dozen, in 8pt. Presumably, therefore, the printer could manage both, but kept very largely to Roman 10pt. A fuller use should most certainly have been made of the facilities available. The text is lucid and concise, and the author's handling of his information is in general admirable. But as the typography stands the pages are flat, and in parts it is not easy to follow the text quickly, as one should be able to do in a work of this kind. Light uniform capitals are a poor treatment at the best of times; and they are more, not less, difficult to read than the ordinary line of light upper and lower case letters. In the present work it is by no means easy to take in the English names of the species at a glance, and occasionally confusion is liable to arise with the type localities. The pity is that after so much good work has gone into composing the text, it should be treated so indifferently in the manner of setting it.

The first list of Bornean birds was published by Hugh (later Sir Hugh) Low in 1848, as an appendix to his book on Sarawak.⁶ It is apparently no more than a list of all the Bornean species then represented in the British Museum (N.H.), where the collections of birds, mammals and insects were enriched by donations from Low at the end of 1847. The Bornean list thus constituted includes some fifty-nine species. Additional forms were added by a number of collectors over the next forty years: the most important of these during the earlier part of the period being James Motley,⁷ the two Italians, O. Beccari and the Marquis G. Doria, and the Hungarian, J. Xantus: and during the latter part, the German, F. J. Grabowsky, the Dutchman Dr. J. Buttikofer, and H. T. Ussher, W. H. Treacher, John Whitehead and finally A. H. Everett.

6. Hugh Low, *Sarawak; its inhabitants & productions; being notes during a residence in the country with H.H. the Rajah Brooke*, London, 1848. See Appendix, pp. 409-11. Hugh Low (1824-1905) went to Borneo on behalf of his family's business (looking for unusual tropical plants that could be sent to England for sale), arriving c. 1844. In Sarawak he came under the influence of James Brooke, and remained there with him until July 1847, when they both returned to England. The following year Low came out again with Brooke & 'Puffing Billy' Napier on H.M.S. *Mæander* (Capt. Hon'able H. Keppel), as secretary to the newly-formed government of Labuan. In August (1848), while in Singapore, he married Napier's illegitimate daughter, Catherine (ob. 1851), by whom he had a son (Hugh Brooke Low) & a daughter, who later married [Sir] John Pope Hennessy, Governor of Labuan (1867-71). Relations were not always happy between Hugh Low and his son-in-law, and on one occasion shortly before the latter left he had his father-in-law arrested on the charge of keeping native mistresses and giving the subordinate government posts to their relatives. Low remained at Labuan, occupying various positions, including that of acting Governor before & after Hennessy's tour of office, until 1877, when he was appointed British Resident in Perak, where he continued until his retirement in 1889.

7. James Motley's collecting at Labuan (til 1854) and Banjermassin (1854-60) added fifty-eight birds to the Bornean list, one less than the total on Low's list. Smythies says that Motley arrived in Labuan in 1851 or 1852, but I cannot escape the feeling that he must have been there from 1850, at least. On 25 March, 1851, L. Llewellyn Dillwyn read a paper to the Zoological Society of London 'On an undescribed species of *Megapodius*' (*P.Z.S.*, pt. 19, 1851, pp. 118-20): he begins 'My friend James Motley, who is now conducting the operations of the Eastern Archipelago Company in Labuan, has lately sent me home a box of zoological specimens . . .'; by this date he had also received several letters.

A. H. Everett added twenty-eight species to the Bornean list himself, and in 1889 published his 'List of the birds of the Bornean group of Islands', in the twentieth number of the *Journal of the Straits Branch, Royal Asiatic Society*.⁸ He included Palawan and Cagayan Sulu, in the Sulu Sea, in the area that he covered, and claimed for it a total of 570 species, of which thirty-four occur in the Palawan group, but not in the Bornean Province proper, as defined by F. N. Chasen in 1935. Everett's list remained the standard list for the next twenty-five years. Then in 1914 it was superseded by J. C. Moulton's 'Hand-list of the Birds of Borneo', published in the sixty-seventh number of the same journal.⁹ Moulton omitted Palawan, but nonetheless carried 555 species on his list. For all but one or two he cited the name of the first collector known to have taken an example of it on Borneo or one of the adjacent islands, and the first author to record its presence there. He also provides a most thorough bibliography of 231 entries, covering all the earlier taxonomic papers.

The present list adds more than a dozen species to the Bornean avifauna, though previously it had seemed that the field was pretty well closed. In part these additions have come from the collection of over 7,300 skins made between 1951 and 1954, as a result of most generous financial assistance from Loke Wan Tho of Singapore. With them Smythies has arrived at a total of 552 species for the Bornean Province. This figure is three lower than Moulton's total, in spite of the additions, the net loss being due in part to earlier records now disallowed, and in part to the disappearance of several forms as separate species, following revisions in nomenclature. The recent additions include a number of more or less Palearctic species: Bulwer's Petrel, the Water Rail, Hen-Harrier, Ruff, Blackheaded Gull, Skylark, Tree Pipit and Wheatear. The names used in Smythies's list are in general exceptionally good. We are glad to see the plovers back in the genus *Charadrius* after their wanderings. But on the adverse side we must note *Trichastoma* for *Aethastoma*, and *Zoothera* for *Geochiela*, and worst of all *Dicaeum celebicum*, though we grant the logic underlying the changes, and that on present information they are inevitable.

One of the many interesting points that emerge from Smythies's list is the contribution made by the early Dutch and German collectors to the Bornean list. Croockewit in 1881 took two kinds of Cormorants, the Painted Snipe, Sacred Kingfisher and Glossy Ibis. Grabowsky, in the same year, took the Java Pond Heron, two kinds of Whistling Teal, the Black Moorhen, Purple Coot, Blackwinged Stilt and the Long-tailed and Crested Jacanas. They were obtained at the former Bangkau Lake, near Banjarmasin, now drained as a rice bowl: they have seldom or never been taken there, or elsewhere in Borneo, by anyone since. A large proportion of the endemic species, on the other hand, were first taken by A. H. Everett, John Whitehead and Charles Hose, and described by the industrious Rev. R. B. Sharpe. In some respects, of course, the latter was too industrious, in that he described as new species a number of forms which do not differ significantly from birds occurring in neighbouring areas. Some of these linger on as subspecies, in others his name has now disappeared, while in still others, such as *Parus major* judgement is suspended until more material is available for study.

⁸ A. Hart Everett, C.M.Z.S., 'A List of the Birds of the Bornean Group of Islands', *JSBRAS*, 20, 1889, pp. 91-212, two maps (Borneo & Palawan). Everett's paper is dated 14 May, 1889: the title-page of the journal also bears the date '1889', but it must have been published in March or later the following year, as it includes a report of the Annual General Meeting of the Society for 1890 (held, 14 February, 1890).

⁹ J. C. Moulton, 'Hand-list of the Birds of Borneo', *JSBRAS*, 67, 1914, pp. 125-91.

There are many good things in this checklist. The Mountain Imperial Pigeon (175) is taken among Brunei mangroves, as it is at times in those at Penang and Malacca. All three races of the Malayan Hawk Cuckoo (191), one resident, one from India and one from China, are now found here. The Brown-breasted Bee-eater (268), so common in Malaya and the Philippines, is a rare visitor to Borneo, with half a dozen entries. The resident Malayan race (*megarhynchus*) of the Bluewinged Pitta (321) may not occur at all in Borneo. I think a Giant Pitta (316) was taken by Everett as far south as Marup, near Simanggang. The Small Minivet (345) appears once for the south of Borneo, after missing out Malaya and perhaps Sumatra. The Great Tit (485) recorded by F. G. H. Allen makes a welcome appearance near Kuching; the only previous Borneo records were two, near the Bengo range, south of Bau, prior to 1885-9. The Blackcapped White-eye (516) is restored to Mt. Mulu and there is the welcome sight record of a flock of Violetbacked Starlings (524) in the Lawas district.

There are also some controversial items. The Bintulu Mallard (43) has a green speculum, and is probably the Australian Mallard, *Anas superciliosa*. Everett took another Pintail (45) from Labuan, now in the British Museum (N.H.) collection. The Sibu Tufted Duck (49) may have come from the Sultan of Johore's lake, where at this period many were being kept. There is no mention of the possible appearance of the nominate race of the Marsh Harrier (72), which is said to be much the commoner of the two forms in Malaya (*BRM*, 20, 1949: 44, regards *spilonotus* as specifically distinct from *aruginosus*). I believe the two Falconets (75) & (76) differ in depth of bills. The Peacock Pheasant (93) from Trusan was exhibited in the Sarawak Museum prior to the war. The Grey Plover (109) is purely a shore bird, and not 'partial to lawns', unlike the Golden Plover. The Dulit Phalarope (147), now in the British Museum (N.H.), was taken by a Kenyah youth with a double-barrelled .410 pistol, not as stated on pp. 613-4.

Many waders in pre-war times, at least, were passage migrants—they were not taken or recorded in December and January. They are now listed as winter visitors: Little Ringed Plover (111), Lesser Sand-Plover (114), Bartailed Godwit (122), Redshank (123), Wood Sandpiper (128), Grey-rumped Tattler (131), Swinhoe's Snipe (135), Longtoed Stint (141), and Curlew-Sandpiper (143): are there additional records in the Loke Wan Tho collection? I think that most collectors find the Chestnutheaded Ground-Thrush (398) in the highlands rather than in the lowlands. The lowland Whistling Thrush (399) of Malaya and Sumatra is *caeruleus*; it is a race of this species that one would expect to find in the lowlands of Borneo. James Lee Petters once sent me a list of Mjoberg's birds from Mt. Tibang, including two Black-&-Crimson Orioles (542) and one Black Oriole (541): they had been taken in the same locality.

Ornithologists do not agree yet which birds should rate as montane in Borneo. The Ferruginous Wood-Partridge (84), Orange-breasted Trogon (254), and Mountain Wren-Babbler are submontane outside Borneo. Submontane in Borneo are the Flycatcher-Shrike (341), Blackcrowned Bulbul (363), Whitethroated Flycatcher-Warbler (447), Grey Drongo (534) and many others listed here as montane residents.

There are a few special features. Some years before the war, a Malay boat went by at Sundar with a dead Adjutant Stork (36) on deck. The owner said he had shot it in the Belangsar River—it was easy: they nested there. They are now seen no more in the

Lawas district, and no doubt the Darter colony (14) died out the same way, long ago. Seemingly Dr. Gibson-Hill agrees that these and similar species really were quite plentiful in restricted parts of Malaya formerly; he suggests that the spread of reasonably efficient 'sporting' fire-arms among the Malays during the last quarter of the nineteenth century was responsible for their elimination. This could apply also to the pelicans, both here and in Malaya (cf pp. 554-5, where Smythies is not disposed to allow Spenser St John his 'most monstrous Pelicans' at Balambangan): in Malaya there has not been authentic report of a pelican for fifty-over years, but there are a few earlier formal records; in 1880, A. O. Hume wrote in 'some years Pelicans appear in prodigious numbers on the coasts of the Malay Peninsula'; earlier Maingay said that *P. roseus* generally appeared in large flocks and at irregular intervals.¹⁰ Some Buntal boatmen brought a Kuching friend of mine six Longbilled Curlews (120), all too far gone to preserve or even eat. The birds must have been very numerous for Malays to have had such a surplus that they had six to offer to a friend twenty miles off, in Kuching. The references to the pelicans in Malaya certainly suggest that even when plentiful, the quantity varied much from year to year; probably as Smythies suggests (p. 603) the different waders vary largely in numbers from year to year.

The migration described for the House Swift (245) is more characteristic of the movements of the Pacific Swift, as yet not known from Borneo. *Paya Maga* is a precise locality: it is a flat, scruffy plain set among jungle-covered hills, apparent from the ground and presumably also from the air. The Maga River (*Pah Maga*) rises in the hills behind, and I have called them the Maga Mountains. In these hills in 1937 I saw two Mountain Black-Eyes (521): they are the specimens on which Mees founded his race *fusciceps*.¹¹ The position and height (5,500 feet) of the hills was determined on a subsequent visit in 1939.

The map at the end is potentially misleading. On it all the land over 3,000 feet above sea level is marked purple (an unforgettable purple, if not a memorable one), except for Mt. Kalulong, which reaches 5,500 feet, high in the upper Baram. But the purple patches are often only two to three hundred feet above the 3,000 foot contour: such are the hills in the Upper Mukah River, upper Katibas River and on the Selantik Range, to mention a few that I have visited personally. It is most incorrect to suppose that these purple patches which only just top the 3,000-foot mark have a montane fauna: they have no such thing. Similarly Mt. Trusmadi and Mt. Mulu are shown separate from their main ranges. Actually the divides are narrow and only just under 3,000 feet: in both cases the avifauna is the same as that on the adjacent main ranges. Would it not be possible to pick out the approximate extent of effective areas, in presenting a map of this kind, instead of laying the shading precisely to the contour lines? After all, though purple patches are apparently popular in the *Sarawak Museum Journal* these days, the colours of a map are chosen arbitrarily for contrast (and harmony?): why not the shapes as well as the colours of the patches?

10. A. O. Hume, 'The birds of the western half of the Malay Peninsula (third notice)', *Stray Feathers*, 9, 1880, pp. 107-32, see p. 119. A. C. Maingay, 'Notes on rare & little-known Malayan Mammals and Birds', *Proc. Asiatic Soc., Bengal*, 1868, pp. 194-8, see p. 194.

11. In G. F. Mees, 'Geographical & individual variation in *Chlorocharis emiliae* Sharpe', *Sarawak Museum Journal*, 21 Old Series (Vol. 6, pt 6, New Series), 1955, pp. 641-61, see p. 649.

B. E. Smythies is a well-known and hard-working Forest Officer. He spent two months in the Sarawak Museum (tackling 'the mass of museum and literary material, so long uncoordinated and sometimes almost chaotic?'), and two months at the British Museum (where we trust he found things better co-ordinated). It is a first class feat to produce a checklist as good as this in any time. The final proof of the draft was checked elsewhere, and for this Smythies is not responsible. We have raised a number of small points here, but they do not add up to much when weighed against the solid achievement of the list as a whole.

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